

Developing the Cambridge Strategic Action Plan on Homelessness: An Action-focused Community Process

Update presented by the Department of Human Service Programs, in concert with other City
Departments, Community Partners and Stakeholders

October 2015

Introduction

The Planning and Development Division of the Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs and the Cambridge CoC began working in early 2015 to implement a community-engaged process to address homelessness in Cambridge. Our objective was to conduct a thorough, thoughtful, and intentional review of potential implementation strategies and do it in an open and authentic manner. We chose an intensive planning process that is intended to propose tangible action steps in a relatively short period of time.

History of Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness in Cambridge

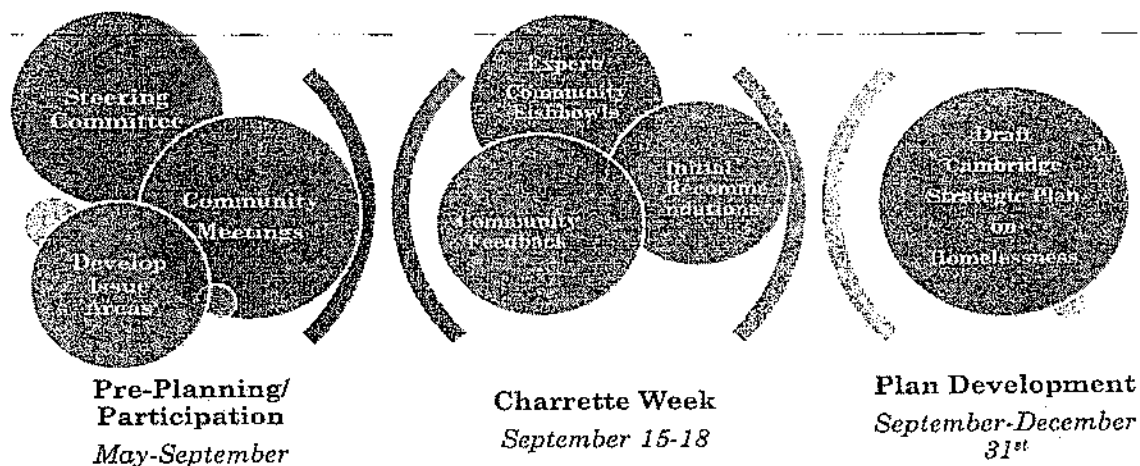
In 2005, the City of Cambridge published the "Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Cambridge." The plan outlined a framework for housing and services to prevent and end homelessness in the city. The plan also identified obstacles to achieving success, including the regional nature of homelessness, the high cost of housing, a lack of subsidies and other funding, and the high needs of the people the system serves. Since the plan's release ten years ago, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has remained relatively stable, despite considerable work to overcome these barriers.

Over the last decade, the Cambridge community has also dedicated significant financial and human resources to the effort to prevent and end homelessness. There has been some expansion of affordable housing in Cambridge including units for formerly homeless individuals. The Cambridge Continuum of Care has worked with providers to improve data and coordination of services. While Cambridge still faces considerable challenges, the community is rich with dedicated providers, investors, and stakeholders who will continue to lead the movement to ensure homelessness in Cambridge is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

The Charrette Process

To condense planning time while involving a broad range of stakeholders, Cambridge engaged the Corporation for Support Housing (CSH) to facilitate this work using the CSH Charrette process. The CSH Charrette is specifically designed to help communities address key issues in ending homelessness at the local level. Similar to a traditional architectural Charrette, the CSH Charrette provides a fast-paced but thorough exploration of the critical aspects of developing plans and action steps. CSH Charrettes capitalize on local and external expertise as well as the community organizing principle of engaging stakeholders in a dynamic process.

The goal of this Charrette was to produce a feasible set of recommendations to inform the Cambridge Strategic Plan on Homelessness. After the Charrette process, the project begins the process of developing an action plan leading to implementation.



Steering Committee

The Charrette planning process is driven by a cross-sectional and diverse Steering Committee. Cambridge's Charrette Steering Committee came together in May to begin the planning process. The Steering Committee spent five months, alongside CSH and Continuum of Care staff, providing local context, identifying issue areas, conducting community meetings to gain community input, outreaching to involve others in the community, and coordinate Charrette logistics.

Charrette Week

Charrette Week kicked off on September 15, 2015 with two full days of intense dialogue at the Sheraton Commander. The conversation focused on the six identified issue areas.

Each conversation occurred in a “fishbowl” setting with a group of experts sitting in a circle surrounded by outer circles of community stakeholders. For the first hour, the local and external experts engaged in a dialogue that encouraged thinking of new systemic and programmatic responses in the issue areas. Experts from diverse communities and organizations drew from their experiences and expertise to exchange views and craft suggestions for moving forward.



While the expert dialogue occurred, the rest of the Charrette participants observed the discussion without comment. Half way through, the conversation among the experts ended and CSH facilitated audience observations and feedback. During this time, the experts were not allowed to respond, and community members were given ample opportunity to agree with or challenge the experts and to offer other suggestions on the issue areas. The purpose of this part of each fishbowl session was to engage a broad range of community members in the discussion and benefit from their expertise and experiences.

Following the intensive public process, CSH distilled the information into draft recommendations for each of the six issue areas. Draft recommendations were presented at an open community meeting on Friday September 18th, 2015. At this session, CSH heard input on how well the recommendations did or did not reflect the learnings from the Charrette and tested the recommendations to gauge their likelihood for implementation. The feedback session was highly productive and will inform Cambridge's Strategic Action Plan on Homelessness to be released near the end of the year.

Issue Area Discussions

1. Serving Frequent Users of Emergency Services

In most urban communities a small number of people with complex, unmet needs who experience homelessness are frequently involved in the criminal justice system, and also frequently use shelters and emergency health care. They often have long histories of homelessness and untreated or poorly managed mental illnesses and addictions. Their frequent stays in county or city jails, shelters, hospitals, and sobering centers result in extraordinarily high costs in multiple public systems, but fail to improve the outcomes for the individuals or their communities.

Cambridge has providers and stakeholders across systems who are committed to serving those who are often labeled the 'hardest to serve'. The following are key actions to continue to enhance services to frequent users of emergency services in Cambridge.

2. The Housing First Model

Housing First is a well-evidenced practice for vulnerable populations who experience long-term homelessness as well as other homeless households who experience homelessness primarily due to economic reasons. This model is particularly effective for chronically homeless individuals and frequent users. Cambridge has dedicated Housing First providers that often struggle with barriers and access to housing.

3. Strategies for Increasing Investment

Many issues discussed throughout the Charrette were dependent on the addition of new resources or repurposing of existing resources. Cambridge has a base of wealth that remains untapped for the homeless response system. Participants explored innovative investment strategies and models, some through new methods and new investors.

4. Increasing Housing Supply for People who are Homeless

Addressing the issue of affordable housing is extremely difficult in a community with a market as tight as Cambridge. Without an adequate supply of deeply affordable and supportive housing, ending and preventing homelessness will be an ongoing struggle for providers and people experiencing homelessness.

5. Services and Policies to Prevent Homelessness

Prevention of homelessness in Cambridge is two-fold: 1. Preventing individuals and families from ever entering the homeless response systems; and 2. Preventing future episodes of homelessness for formerly homeless individuals and families placed in stable housing.

6. Service Navigation and Systems Coordination

Cambridge recognizes that successful strategies and outcomes are dependent on other systems of care participating in the effort to prevent and end homelessness. Additionally, a coordinated access approach can improve the targeting of the appropriate level of services and housing to people in need.

Next Steps

Staff of the Human Services Department will be reviewing various forms of input from the charrette process and work with the Steering Committee to draft the Cambridge Action Plan on Homeless. The draft plan will be available near the end of the year and available on the City and CoC websites and include a public comment period.

Appendix A

Cambridge Charrette Steering Committee

Cassie Arnaud	City of Cambridge- Community Development Department
Sgt. Fred Cabral	Cambridge Police Department
Paula Cushner	Cambridge Healthcare for the Homeless
Odessa Deffenbaugh	Bay Cove/ CASPAR
Elaine DeRosa	Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
Greg Grays-Thomas	HomeStart
Michael Johnston	Cambridge Housing Authority
Stacey King	Cambridge Public Health Department
Liz Mengers	City of Cambridge/ Cambridge CoC
George Metzger	Business Community
Rev. Joe Robinson	Christ Church
Martha Sandler	On the Rise
Ellen Shachter	Greater Boston Legal Services
Mary Shannon Thomas	Eliot Community Human Services
Sean Terry	New England Center for Homeless Veterans

Appendix B

Appendix B: Charrette Fishbowl Participants

Topic	Participants
Serving Frequent Users of Emergency Services	<p><i>Experts</i></p> <p>Mark Casanova, Homeless Health Care Los Angeles Sarah Ciambone, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Kevin Irwin, CSH</p> <p><i>Fishbowl Facilitator:</i> Chelsea Ross, CSH</p> <p><i>Community Facilitator:</i> Heather Lyons, CSH</p> <p>Heather Patrick, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Cathy Pemberton, Cambridge Police Department Mary Shannon Thomas, Eliot Community Human Services</p>
The Housing First Model	<p><i>Experts</i></p> <p>Suzanne Armstrong, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Emily Buzzell, Miriam's Kitchen (Washington, DC) Lori Cain, HomeStart</p> <p><i>Fishbowl Facilitator:</i> Heather Lyons, CSH</p> <p><i>Community Facilitator:</i> Larry Oaks, CSH</p> <p>Mark Casanova, Homeless Health Care Los Angeles Sam Dodge, San Francisco Mayor's Office of HOPE Heather Patrick, Boston Health Care for the Homeless</p>
Strategies for Increasing Investment	<p><i>Experts</i></p> <p>Chris Cotter, City of Cambridge, Community Development Department Peter Daly, Homeowner's Rehab, Inc. Larry Gottlieb, Eliot Community Human Services Aimee Hendrigan, Melville Charitable Trust Tom Lorello, Heading Home Eva Martin Blythe, YWCA Cambridge</p> <p><i>Fishbowl Facilitator:</i> Larry Oaks, CSH</p> <p><i>Community Facilitator:</i> Chelsea Ross, CSH</p>

Increasing Housing Supply for People who are Homeless	<p><i>Experts</i> Chris Cotter, City of Cambridge — Community Development Department Peter Daly, Homeowner's Rehab, Inc. John Dunne, Corporation for Supportive Housing Aaron Gornstein, Preservation of Affordable Housing Greg Russ, Cambridge Housing Authority Mark Winkeller, Caritas Communities</p>	<p>Fishbowl Facilitator: Larry Oaks, CSH</p> <p>Community Facilitator: Heather Lyons, CSH</p>
Services and Policies to Prevent Homelessness	<p><i>Experts</i> Beth Anderson, HomeStart Larry Gottlieb, Eliot Community Human Services Miriam Greenburg, Eliot Community Human Services Risa Mednick, Transition House Ellen Shachter, Greater Boston Legal Services</p>	<p><i>Fishbowl Facilitator:</i> Chelsea Ross, CSH</p> <p><i>Community Facilitator:</i> Larry Oaks, CSH</p>
Service Navigation and Systems Coordination	<p><i>Experts</i> Emily Buzzell, Miriam's Kitchen (Washington, DC) Sam Dodge, San Francisco Mayor's Office of HOPE Josh Levin, City of Cambridge — Department of Human Service Programs Jim O'Connell, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Tom Plihcik, New Lease for Homeless Families Lisa Tepper Bates, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness</p>	<p><i>Fishbowl Facilitator:</i> Heather Lyons, CSH</p> <p><i>Community Facilitator:</i> Chelsea Ross, CSH</p>